United Nations A/73/521

General Assembly

Distr.: General
15 November 2018

Original: English

Seventy-third session
Agenda item 52

Effects of atomic radiation

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

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I. Introduction

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2018, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its seventy-third session the item entitled "Effects of atomic radiation" and to allocate it to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

2. The Fourth Committee considered the item, held a general debate and took action on the item at its 22nd meeting, on 6 November 2018. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected the relevant summary record.[1]

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/73/46).

4. At the 22nd meeting, on 6 November, the representative of Belgium, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, made a statement on the work of that Committee.

[1] See A/C.4/73/SR.22.

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II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.4/73/L.9 and the amendment thereto contained in document A/C.4/73/L.12

5. At the 22nd meeting, on 6 November, the representative of Belgium, on behalf of Belarus, Belgium, Canada, France, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovenia, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, introduced a draft resolution entitled "Effects of atomic radiation" (A/C.4/73/L.9). Subsequently, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine joined in sponsoring the draft resolution.

6. At the same meeting, the Committee had before it a statement of the programme budget implications of the draft resolution, submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly (A/C.4/73/L.13).

7. Also at the same meeting, the Committee had before it an amendment to draft resolution A/C.4/73/L.9, contained in document A/C.4/73/L.12, submitted by the United States of America.

8. Also at the 22nd meeting, the Committee was informed that the proposed amendment had no programme budget implications.

9. At the same meeting, the Committee rejected the amendment contained in document A/C.4/73/L.12 by a recorded vote of 17 to 7, with 114 abstentions. The voting was as follows:

In favour:

Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Israel, Peru, Ukraine, United States of America.

Against:

Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Zimbabwe.

Abstaining:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia.

10. Also at the same meeting, the Committee took action on draft resolution A/C.4/73/L.9 as follows:

(a) Operative paragraph 21 (e) was retained by a recorded vote of 136 to 2, with 4 abstentions. The voting was as follows:

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Against:

Israel, United States of America.

Abstaining:

Honduras, Peru, Sudan, Togo.

(b) Draft resolution A/C.4/73/L.9, as a whole, was adopted without a vote (see para. 11).

III. Recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

11. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Effects of atomic radiation

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 913 (X) of 3 December 1955, by which it established the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, and its subsequent resolutions on the subject, in which, inter alia, it requested the Scientific Committee to continue its work,

Concerned about the potentially harmful effects on present and future generations resulting from the levels of radiation to which humankind and the environment are exposed,

Conscious of the continuing need to examine and compile information about atomic and ionizing radiation and to analyse its effects on humankind and the environment, and conscious also of the increased volume, complexity and diversity of that information,

Acknowledging the concerns about the radiological consequences of nuclear accidents,

Reaffirming the desirability of the Scientific Committee continuing its work, and welcoming the increased commitment of States members of the Committee,

Emphasizing the vital need for sufficient, assured and predictable funding, as well as efficient management, of the work of the secretariat of the Scientific Committee to arrange the annual sessions and coordinate the development of documents based on scientific reviews of the sources of ionizing radiation and its effects on human health and the environment,

Recognizing the increasing importance of the scientific work of the Scientific Committee and the need to carry out unforeseen additional work, such as after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station,

Considering that the high quality of the work and the scientific rigour of the Scientific Committee need to be maintained in the future,

Recognizing the importance of disseminating the findings of the Scientific Committee, in particular to the public, and widely publicizing scientific knowledge about atomic radiation, and recalling in that context principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,[1]

Noting the need for the resources of the Scientific Committee to be sufficient, assured and predictable, and recognizing the importance of voluntary contributions to the general trust fund established by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to support the work of the Committee,

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex I.

Bearing in mind that the incorporation of new members will imply a proportional increase in operational costs for the Scientific Committee, including travel costs,

Commending the secretariat of the Scientific Committee for its ongoing efforts to ensure the sustainable and effective work of the Committee, and encouraging all States in a position to do so to provide support to the secretariat of the Committee,

Highlighting the statements of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization, in which they expressed support and appreciation for the Scientific Committee's work in producing the most reliable and comprehensive sources of scientific information about the levels and effects of ionizing radiation and noted that, without it, safety guidance and safety standards could not be developed and maintained and priorities for research in the areas of sources and effects of ionizing radiation could not be determined,

Noting with concern the developments which resulted in the request by the Scientific Committee at its sixty-fifth session to the Office of Internal Oversight Services to conduct: (a) an investigation or inspection into the process to recruit the Scientific Secretary to ensure that the successful candidate is selected on the basis of scientific qualifications and credibility and that the process is aligned with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations; and (b) an internal audit or evaluation to clarify whether the United Nations Environment Programme is the most appropriate body to serve the Committee in the future,[2]

Noting with concern also that the sixty-fifth session of the Scientific Committee had to be postponed as a result of, inter alia, the continued delay in the appointment of the Secretary of the Scientific Committee, while recognizing the important work done by the Acting Secretary by preparing documents of a high scientific quality for the rescheduled sixty-fifth session,

Noting the concern of the Scientific Committee with regard to the lack of a mechanism for the deputization of the Scientific Officer as Secretary and disruptions in staffing at the secretariat, which has made the Committee seriously vulnerable and has hampered the efficient implementation of its approved programme of work and progress with the project plans on second primary cancers after radiotherapy and on epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer,

1. *Commends* the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation for the valuable contribution that it has been making since its inception to wider knowledge and understanding of the levels, effects and risks of exposure to ionizing radiation and for fulfilling its original mandate with scientific authority and independence of judgment;

2. *Reaffirms* the decision to maintain the present functions and independent role of the Scientific Committee;

3. *Re-emphasizes* the need for the Scientific Committee to hold regular sessions on an annual basis so that its report will be able to reflect the latest developments and findings in the field of ionizing radiation and thereby provide updated information for dissemination among all States;

4. *Notes with appreciation* the work of the Scientific Committee, and takes note of the report on its sixty-fifth session,[2] including the report on the implementation of its long-term strategic directions, and encourages the Committee, over its coming sessions, to continue to work towards implementing strategies to

[2] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-third Session, Supplement No. 46* (A/73/46).

support its long-term efforts to serve the scientific community, as well as wider audiences;

5. *Welcomes* the establishment of an ad hoc working group to assist the Scientific Committee in developing its future programme of work for the period 2020–2024 on the effects of radiation exposure and the biological mechanisms by which they occur;[3]

6. *Appreciates* the arrangements made by the Scientific Committee for activities to follow up on its 2013 evaluation of the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident after the 2011 great east-Japan earthquake and tsunami;

7. *Looks forward* to the Scientific Committee's evaluations of selected health effects and of risk inference due to radiation exposure and its evaluation on lung cancer from exposure to radon, as their outcomes are relied upon by other organizations of the United Nations system;

8. *Requests* the Scientific Committee to continue its work, including its important activities to increase knowledge of the levels, effects and risks of ionizing radiation from all sources, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session;

9. *Supports* the intentions and plans of the Scientific Committee for conducting its programme of work of scientific review and assessment on behalf of the General Assembly, in particular its next periodic global surveys of radiation exposure, to be conducted in close cooperation with other relevant organizations, and requests the Committee to submit plans for its ongoing and future programme of work to the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session;

10. *Welcomes* developments in streamlining procedures for publishing the reports of the Scientific Committee electronically on its official website and as sales publications, and calls upon the secretariat to continue both to monitor the timely publication of those reports and to strive to publish them within the same calendar year as their approval;

11. *Invites* the Scientific Committee to continue its consultations with scientists and experts from interested Member States in the process of preparing its future scientific reports, and requests the secretariat to continue to facilitate such consultations;

12. *Welcomes*, in this context, the readiness of Member States to provide the Scientific Committee with relevant information on the levels and effects of ionizing radiation, and invites the Committee to analyse and give due consideration to such information, particularly in the light of its own findings;

13. *Recalls* the strategy of the Scientific Committee to improve data collection, encourages in this regard Member States, the organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations concerned to provide further relevant data about levels, effects and risks of radiation exposure from various sources, which would greatly help in the preparation of future reports of the Committee to the General Assembly, and encourages the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and other relevant organizations to further collaborate with the secretariat on arrangements for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data on radiation exposures of patients, workers and the public;

[3] Ibid., chap. II, sect. B.

14. *Welcomes* the use and ongoing development by the secretariat of an online platform for collecting data on the exposure of patients and workers, and urges Member States to take part in the Scientific Committee's global surveys of radiation exposure and to nominate a national contact person to facilitate coordination of the collection and submission of data on the exposure of patients, workers and the public within the country;

15. *Takes note* of the Scientific Committee's outreach strategy for the coming years, in particular the enhancement of the website of the Committee and the publication of informative leaflets and posters in all the official languages of the United Nations, and continues to encourage that consideration be given to publishing the website in all of those languages;

16. *Requests* the United Nations Environment Programme to continue, within existing resources, to service the Scientific Committee and to disseminate its findings to Member States, the scientific community and the public and to ensure that the administrative measures in place are appropriate, including clear roles and responsibilities of the various actors, so that the secretariat is able to adequately and efficiently service the Committee in a predictable and sustainable manner and effectively facilitate the use of the invaluable expertise offered to the Committee by its members in order that the Committee may discharge the responsibilities and mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly;

17. *Regrets* that the United Nations Environment Programme secretariat has not appointed a new Secretary of the Scientific Committee in a timely manner, thereby jeopardizing continuity in the Committee secretariat, and insists that all steps be taken to ensure such continuity and that any ongoing selection process is expedited and managed in a transparent manner;

18. *Requests* the Secretary-General to strengthen support for the Scientific Committee within existing resources, particularly with regard to the deputization of the Secretary of the Committee, the avoidance of disruptions in staffing and the increase in operational costs in the case of a further increase in membership, and to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session on these issues;

19. *Encourages* Member States in a position to do so to make voluntary contributions to the general trust fund established by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme and also to make contributions in kind, in order to support the work of the Scientific Committee, and the dissemination of its findings, in a sustainable manner;

20. *Invites* Algeria, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Norway and the United Arab Emirates to designate one scientist to attend the sixty-sixth session of the Scientific Committee as an observer, pursuant to paragraphs 19 and 20 of General Assembly resolution 72/76 of 7 December 2017 and the procedures referred to in paragraph 21 below;

21. *Adopts*, pursuant to paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 66/70 of 9 December 2011, a procedure for possible further increases in the membership of the Scientific Committee consisting of the following provisions:

(a) Interested Member States may avail themselves of the suggested framework of criteria and indicators for membership contained in the report of the Secretary-General on membership of the Scientific Committee and the financial implications of increased membership;[4]

[4] A/66/524, para. 16.

(b) States Members of the United Nations may express interest in membership in the Scientific Committee at any time by addressing a note verbale to that effect to the Secretary-General;

(c) Every 10 years, the Secretary-General shall refer to the General Assembly a list of Member States that have expressed interest in membership in the Scientific Committee, the first such list having been provided in 2017[5] and the next list to be provided in 2027;

(d) After having been referred by the Secretary-General in accordance with subparagraph (c) above, each Member State shall be invited to designate a scientist as an observer to the annual session of the Scientific Committee in the year following its referral. During their first year as observers attending the annual session, observer scientists shall prepare an outline of the expertise and potential contribution of their State to the work of the Committee;

(e) The General Assembly, in accordance with subparagraph (g) below and with due consideration of the advice of the Scientific Committee, shall decide on the adoption of observers as States members of the Committee in the fourth year. The advice shall be based on due consideration of a fair degree of participation in accordance with the Secretary-General's suggested framework of criteria and indicators for membership;[4]

(f) On the fourth year after each round of accession of members, the Secretary-General shall report to the General Assembly on the experience of the increase in membership of the Scientific Committee with regard to its effectiveness, quality of work and equitable geographical distribution, on the financial impact of the recent increase in membership and on financial implications for future expansion;

(g) Any further increases in membership shall occur only after financial aspects are fully reviewed and if the secretariat of the Scientific Committee is appropriately strengthened, in accordance with conclusions drawn in previous reports of the Secretary-General.[6]

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[5] A/72/557.

[6] Including A/63/478, A/66/524 and A/69/350.